

2018.01.30

3 Deputy S.Y. Mézec of the Chief Minister regarding the provision of statistics relating to relative low income: [OQ.22/2018]

Will the Chief Minister be in a position to provide more up-to-date statistics on relative low income in Jersey before the general election of May 2018 and, if not, why not?

Senator I.J. Gorst (The Chief Minister):

The Income Distribution Survey takes a year to run and reports on a 5-year cycle with the next report due in 2020. Nevertheless this is, as I have said previously, an important statistic and in July last year I outlined to the Assembly that we would endeavour to identify funding from carry-forwards so that the survey could run one year earlier. That is therefore starting in this year and reporting next year.

4.3.1 Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

Would the Chief Minister agree that the reports that are asked of him in relation to relatively low income are important but that also it is important that calling to mind an identical question by a former member of the House of Commons to a former U.K. Prime Minister when talking about income inequality, it is not the objective of making the rich relatively less rich in absolute terms. In fact, is he not really wanting to publish information that demonstrates that all income groups have seen real rises in their net income, and these arguments about relative low income must be taken for what they are, it is a gap, and does he not want the gap higher up rather than lower down?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

Equality is important right across communities and later in this States sitting we are going to be talking to a large extent on some areas of equality, which are fundamentally important to our well-being and our future cohesion as a community. The Income Distribution Survey is just one statistical survey that helps inform Government decisions into the future and I am not obsessed with it, perhaps like some Members are, because it does not follow that if you make the rich poorer you make the poor richer, it is known across the world and economists will show that. Having said that, income inequality is an important measure upon which Government must consider when delivering policies.

4.3.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

In answer to the Deputy of St. Ouen about this particular topic, he said that: "Decisions will be taken with the Chief Statistician and I am fully content to keep the Assembly and the relevant panels informed." That question was asked on 4th July last year about what progress he was making about his wish to update the Income Distribution Survey and yet, as far as I can understand, the money has not as yet to be identified and permission gone ahead to run the Income Distribution in 2018 with a view to reporting early in 2019, as the Minister said he would support previously. Why is it taking so long? When will that decision be made and we will get the I.D.S. (Income Distribution Survey) performed in 2018?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I just said in answer to the Deputy's colleague that I will be endeavouring to argue for funding from the carry forwards. The Deputy shakes his head, he believes that I can act outside of the current law, which allocates monies across departments, and means that the Chief Minister does not have, or any Minister does not have the authority outside of the approved processes of this Assembly, which in this case is the carry forward, despite what my wish is. I have been quite clear, I think it should be brought forward, my officials are making a case. That case will have to be agreed by the

Minister for Treasury and Resources and by Ministers in the carry forward process. I hope, because of his posture during my answer, I hope he is going to give his 100 per cent support to the reform of government that this Assembly I hope will be debating before the next election to make sure that issues like this can be addressed fairly, appropriately, and in good time, because it seems to me that is what he is wanting.

4.3.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Before the Chief Minister puts words into my mouth as to what I want, what I want is a straightforward answer and the answer I want is when will that be done, because we have been waiting since July last year, April last year, for any action from this inert Chief Minister.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

I have been waiting since July for the carry forward process. The carry forward process will take place during I think the first quarter of this year, so I will have a decision, providing other Ministers support it, then that money will be allocated. So if the Deputy in political challenge wants to use the word "inert", you will tell me whether it is appropriate or not, I am not sure it quite does fit what he was trying to say, but anyway if he is so frustrated I really do look forward to his championing the reform of government that will mean that issues like this can be addressed fairly and on a timely basis. But I can see from the nodding of his head he wants to enjoy beating me up in the Assembly; that is the political question for us. But when it comes to real change to make things happen for the benefit of our community, he will vote against it.

Deputy G.P. Southern:

When it comes to real change in our community we will be in the vanguard.

4.3.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

Of course if the Chief Minister is serious about changing this Assembly he will stand on a political platform openly with his colleagues and tell the public before the election the direction he and his colleagues want to take the Island in, be it in an inert way or in a pernicious way, as perhaps has arguably been the case to date.

The Deputy Bailiff:

I am not sure you can challenge the actions of a Member as being pernicious.

Deputy M. Tadier:

I will take that back. I think there is an argument from a political point of view that policies can be pernicious.

The Deputy Bailiff:

I think a policy can be pernicious, I am not sure an individual can take it forward ...

Deputy M. Tadier:

That is true; I will take that back. It was related to policies. But inert is an equally good description of this Council of Ministers on certain issues. But getting back to this question, does the Chief Minister realise and acknowledge that it is important to have up-to-date statistics, especially on relative low income, in the context that if those statistics are not available this States Assembly makes the wrong decisions, as was evidenced by only last week overturning a decision to do with single mothers' pay, because the statistics were not available at the time, and then when they were available to the Assembly the right-thinking Members of this Assembly decided to overturn that

decision and it is therefore imperative that public has all the statistics available before the May elections to cast their judgment on this Government and on this Assembly.

Senator I.J. Gorst:

It is right that members of the public elect Members of this Assembly, if they have been previous Members, on their record and that they have the best available statistics to them when they are making that decision. But we did not have the Income Distribution Survey up to date before Members made the decision to reinstate the lone parent component last week, thereby providing benefit to a small proportion of children in relative low income, rather than the proposal of the Minister, which was to benefit all children in relative low-income households. So you might say it is swings and roundabouts.

4.3.5 Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

I am well aware that in questioning the Chief Minister my own supporters and others wince when I stand up, but being the only other Member to ask the Chief Minister questions on these issues, apart from Reform, I must give the Chief Minister almost an opportunity to refocus the debate, which is really what this is about. Does the Chief Minister not expect, as a result of his policies that have got more people in work, lower unemployment, that the policies to get more people in work, and with the Minister for Social Security, is the way to deal with the statistics that will show that income on all quintiles will rise rather than this pounding that the Chief Minister gets from Reform for statistics to beat him.

The Deputy Bailiff:

Can we just focus on the specific question?

Senator P.F.C. Ozouf:

Does he agree that his policies are the ones that work rather than the ones that are being trying to be beaten out of him from Reform?

The Deputy Bailiff:

Are yours the policies that work, I think is the question?

Senator I.J. Gorst:

They are not just my policies and the Council of Ministers' policies; they are policies being delivered by successful economies around the globe. First of all, we need to have a successful economy. We know what that is based upon in Jersey and we know the time and effort and work that Members of this Assembly and the community put into delivering that. Why do we want that? Because it delivers jobs for our people, because it is only jobs and well-paying jobs and jobs that have proper career opportunities that ultimately raise people out of relative low income. Not just giving them benefits, it is about encouraging them to believe that they have a future, giving them incentives to get on to the housing ladder, giving them incentives to deal with the cost of living, the premium of living here in Jersey, but it is also about a social cohesion in our community as well. It is not just about the issues that the Members opposite keep going on and on and on about without presenting solutions, other than regulation and red tape, putting in doubt our economic success and our economic future. It is a risk I am not prepared to take and I do not believe it is a risk that Members of this Assembly want to take. **[Applauding]**

The Deputy Bailiff:

Final supplementary, Deputy Mézec.

Deputy S.Y. Mézec:

No, thank you, I will spare the Assembly and the public another one of those answers.

Deputy M. Tadier:

It is important to keep a strong economy so that we can pay for zebra crossings across the Island, including in my constituency.

The Deputy Bailiff:

If you can just ask the question immediately, thank you.